



SMOKY MOUNTAIN HISTORY IS ALIVE IN BRYSON CITY

The Tale of the Softhearted Hardware Man. With a bald pate and a ready laugh, Norman Clampitt was a familiar sight around Bryson City, North Carolina, in the 1960s. Perhaps his only fault was his inability to say “no” to the mountain folks of Swain County. So when a customer of his hardware store was a little slow in paying for a fence charger purchased five years earlier, Norman was patient. When son, Monty, took over the store, he drove out to the farmer’s home and asked about the unpaid debt. “The old bald-headed man told me I could pay when I’m ready,” replied the farmer. “I just haven’t been ready yet.”

You’d be surprised how much is unchanged in Swain County. Monty Clampitt still runs the old brick Clampitt Hardware on Main Street in Bryson City. “It’s the oldest continuously operating store in town,” says Monty, “built in 1901.” “We still carry some of the old items,” adds wife, Diana. “Churns, crocks, cowbells... you can even pick up a shingle froe.” If you’re not quite sure what that is, you’ll just have to drop by Clampitt’s when you’re in Bryson City. It’s well worth the trip; the streets of the small Smoky Mountain town are lined with vintage stores filled with friendly folks and fascinating merchandise.

Have a Nice Stay. Just around the corner from Main Street stands The Historic Calhoun House Hotel, which has seen a little history of its own. Believed to have been built in 1904, the charming edifice welcomed renowned visitors including Horace Kephart, a librarian-turned-author who came to the Smokies in 1904. “Kephart’s voice was influential in bringing about the creation of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park,” says hotel owner, Luke D. Hyde. “In fact,” says Hyde, “key meetings were held at the Calhoun regarding the development of the Park, Fontana Dam and the creation of “Unto These Hills,” the inspiring outdoor drama held in nearby Cherokee.” Today, visitors dine in the same room where those momentous meetings took place.

Preserving History. Preserving the Mountains. The people of Swain County are ever mindful of the need to protect the beauty of this remote mountain enclave. You can see that in the carefully preserved heart of pine floors and whistling steam radiators of the Calhoun Hotel, and in the many efforts to recycle, conserve energy, and clean up the rivers and trails that lace the lush, green Smoky Mountains. Named one of the top outdoor towns in America, Bryson City attracts hikers, fishers and whitewater rafters, as well as history buffs who are drawn to the rich cultural past of the early Scotch-Irish settlers and Cherokee Indians.

“Folks around here tend to remember,” says Monty Clampitt. “When customers who owed the store a small amount of money passed on, Pop just wrote ‘deceased’ on the bill and forgot about it. I once came across one where the deceased owed more than \$100 to the store. Pop wrote, ‘Gone but not forgotten.’ That’s one to remember.”

For more information on touring the Smokies, contact the Swain County Chamber of Commerce, 210 Main Street, P.O. Box 509, Bryson City, NC 28713; chamber@greatsmokies.com; or 800-867-9246.